

[William A. Preist]

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Folk Stuff - [?]

Gauthier. Sheldon F.

Rangelore

Tarrant Co. Dist,. #7 [39?]

Page #1

FC 240

William A. Preist, 61, living at [?] Winkler co. Texas, [?] born June 4, 1877 in Gaudaplupe co. Texas, at the farm of his father, Dan T. Preist. His father cultivated land and raised cattle which grazed on the open range. His grandfather, Tom A. Gay. and His father were associated as herd drivers. The two men were among the first who drove herds to the Northern market. William A. Preist went to Winkler co. Texas, in 1895 and worked for the 'W' ranch which was owned by W.D. and Lee Johnson. He continued on the 'W' ranch until 1914 at which time he was [?] to the office of County Sheriff of Winkler co, and he has occupied the office since, except for a period of 18 months. He has watched the [ecos?] River region transform from an openrange where thousands of cattle grazed to an extensive oil producing region.

His story of range life follows:

“The place of my birth was Gandalupe co, Texas, on the farm owned by my father, Dan T. Preist. The event took place June 4, 1877. I was [reared?] on that farm until I was 16 years old.

Library of Congress

"My father farmed and engaged in cattle raising, as practically all the farmers in Graundalupe co. did during those days. In fact, the major indrustry of the county was cattle raising. The farmers were compelled to fence their cultivated fileds to keep the cattle out of their crops. Outside of the scattered fields, the entire county was an [ope?] range upon which cattle grazed.'

"Father raised corn, wheat, [cane?], [cotton?] and vegetables. We consumed practically all produce [?] the farm, except cotton which was sold, except a small [amount?] which we used for making clothing. The amount of wheat raised was sufficient to supply the family's flour needs. C.12 - 2/11/41 - Texas 2 Flour was obtained by taking wheat to the grist mill and having it ground. The miller was paid for the grinding out of a portion of the flour.

"The town where we did our trading was San Antonia, a did-tance of 25 miles from our farm. Therefore, going to town was a special occasion. The trip to town was made on hoss back or riding in a wagon pulled by a team of mules.

"My [f ther?] and grandfather, Tom A Gay, were associated together in the cattle business. When driving herds out of Texas to the Northern markets began, father and grandfather were among the first men to drive a herd. When they started driving I was not yet born, but they were still at it when I became old enough to understand something [ab ut?] what was going on. My first recollection was when they were driving herds to The Fort Worth, market/

"Most of the cattle which the two men drove to the markets were bought from other ranchers, because our herd was not large enough to supply a sufficient amount cattle for a worth while driving herd. Our whole herd numbered around 3000 head and the was the usual number father would gather for a market drive. It cost about as much to drive 1500 as 3000. The crew always consisted [f?] a cooky, [h ss?] wrangler, trail, boss and nothing less than six pointers. Even when driving a herd of 1000 critters, six pointers were the

Library of Congress

least number a driver would be safe in using. With a herd of 3000 to 3500, ten pointers can handle the herd easily.

"I never went on a drive while on father's farm. However, I grew up in [th?] saddle and began doing some [?] on the range when I was 12 years old. When I was 16 years old I could [?] 'em with the average fellow and do my share of the work on the range.

"We did no night riding on our range, which was the custom followed by all the ranchers in our region. The ranchers cooperated in looking after the cattle. All of the ranchers had men riding the range and doing what was necessary, such as attending to the sick and keeping watch [on?] bog holes for bogged cattle. Twice each year a general roundup was held and then each brand/ would be cut out and separated into the respective herds, and driven back to their home range.

"Most [o?] the cattle in a [hrd?] will [grz?] in the vicinity of its water and salt licks, provided the grass is sufficient. [However?], a few would drift off and become mixed with other herds. Each Spring and Fall it was necessary to separate the cattle and of course in the Spring the calves were branded.

"During the late 70's ranchers in the Graudalupe co, section began to drive thier herds westward, which left mostly small herds. I was anxious to work with a big outfit so followed the cattle west.

"I went to the Pecos River region in 1895 and took a job as hoss wrangler on the 'W' Ranch which was owned by Lee and W.D. Johnson. W.D. Johnson now lives in Kansas City. Lee Johnson died at Fort Worth, recently (1938). The camp of the 'W' ranch was located on the Pecos River. The cattle ranged over 125 4 miles of territory which included the range from Carlsbad New Mex, to the Hoss Head Crossing of the Pecos River in Texas. We did not maintain a permanent headquarter. Our camp was generally located somewhere about the center of the range and on the Pecos River. During the Summer

Library of Congress

months we lived in the open, using our saddles for a pillow. In the Winter months we lived in tents.

“Two chuck wagons were used most of the times during the Summer months and the waddies divided into two crews, which was necessary in order to cover the amount of range we worked. The number of cattle carrying the 'W' brand was up into 75,000. The brand was made thus: , and we placed the brand on 10,000 calves during the Spring of 1896.

“There were about 30 steady hands employed on the 'W' outfit. Bill Morehead was ranch foreman. We had two cooks they were Mack McAdams and W. Birdville. Some of the old rawhides who [worked?] on the 'W' outfit were Chas Brown, Red Ruley, R. Connley, Wm Hickles, Bill Newell and Henry Slack. Them men I have named were the steady hands. The others in the crew were shifting all the while. Some would work only a month or two, and others perhaps a year.

“Our chuck was the usual range food, which was beef, beans, canned vegetables, black coffee, dried fruit and bread. The bread was sourdough and corn pone. The chunk was cooked well and the amount was plentiful.

“My work was wrangling hosses. The 'W' outfit kept about 200 hosses in its remuda. I helped to wrangle 100 hosses each 5 year. Out of the 100 about 75 would prove up toostandard as top hosses for range work. It took about 75 hosses each year to replace the worn out and injured hosses. A hoss with an injured leg or foot, or any fault which would slow the animal, was not used, because at any moment the rider might [be?] called upon for top speed. The range hoss traveled over rough ground which contained holes and it [was?] a frequent occurence to have a hoss injured. Pulled tendens and broken legs were the most frequent injuries.

“The system used on the 'W' outfit breaking hosses was to rope and snub it. Then put the saddle on [the?] animal and then mount it. The hoss would start pitching pronto and

Library of Congress

continue until one of the two following things took place. The hoss either threw the rider or became tuckered and convinced it could not throw the rider. When the hoss [learned?] that it couldn't throw the rider it would submit to being handled and soon [?] to commands. /

"There is a vase difference in the way hosses would pitch. Each [hoss?] has, more or less, its individual moves and the waddies had names for the different kinds of pitching. [For?] instance, the hoss which jumped first to one side and then to the other, we called it a fence rower. The hoss which jumped to one side only we called it a sunpercher. The hoss which made a straight forward jump was called a pigeon winger. The toughest pitches, which were rare, was the wriggler. The wriggler jumped forward and up and landed on its front feet with its rear end in the air. While in this upright position it would wiggle its rear end. The rider who could stay on a wriggler had the staying 6 ability of a leech, because keeping on balance issthe secret of riding a pitcher and a wiggle is the hardest move to balance against. There were a few riders which could ride a wriggler, but not many.

"I am amused at rodeos while watching the performers riding those pitching hosses. It is considered a ride if the rider stayss10 seconds and he knows before hand what the hoss is going to do. The old hoss wrangler mounted a critter, without knowing its movements, and had to stay in the saddle from then on. If he couldn't stay with the critter, he was no wrangler.

"Right now I want to relate my experience with a hoss as an introduction to my work on the old 'W' outfit.

"The morning I started to work the foreman pointed out a sleepy looking critter for my mount to use riding out to the hoss range. I saddled the animal and while I was doing it the hoss never moved. I thought the foreman had put off a plug on me for a joke. When I hit the saddle the critter went into the air, landed on its front feet and with its rear about straight up in the air. While in this position the hoss did a shimmy movement and I went to the ground. When I gained my feet I saw the animal standin still with its sleepy attitude and

Library of Congress

about 10 cowhands splitting their sides with laughter. [Then some?] riled me, also I was a little cocky about my riding ability, so I decided to ride the critter or else burst an innard trying. I tackled the hoss again. My second attempt ended as the first, except I lit a litter farther from the hoss and hit the ground some harder. The hoss changed my mind about riding it. Laughter 7 or taunting would [?] to tackle the hoss the third time.

"I was some what ashamed of my self and to keep out of conversation, I picked up a new rifle the foreman had bought, and was pretending that I was examining it. I was watching, out of the corner of my eye, one of the waddies who was st starting to mount the critter. When the fellow started to swing into the saddle his foot slipped through the stirrup and [?]. The hoss pitched and started to run. Instantly I saw the danger the waddie was in. I took aim with the rifle and shot the animal. The hoss tumbled to the ground and, luckily, to the opposit side from the rider. The waddie untangled himself quickly and was none the worse for his experience. The foreman said to me:

"Well, you killed the hoss, but saved the waddy".

"No" I answered boastfully, "the hoss is just creased".

"I didn't think that the hoss was creased. In fact, what I aimed to do was hit it in the brain and drop it pronto. Well, sir, I missed my aim. The bullet went too fat back, but the hit was a neat crease. I was surprised, but acted nonchalantly about it and the crew doffed their [?] covers to me as a top rifel rifle shot. The foreman patted/ me on the back and said, 'you may not be able to ride a wiggler, but you sure are a pert rifle shot'.

"That chance shot initiated me and I was recognized as a pure rawhide.

"On the '[?]' outfit we did night riding to keep the herd in tack and watch for rustlers. [Night?] riding was done in shifts of four hours work.

Library of Congress

"Night riding was pleasant work, except during inclement weather. For instance, on a bright night with the moon shining 8 on a herd which were bedded down was a beautiful sight to see. But, on a night with a cold drizzling rain the job was a tough one. Then if the herd started on a run it was hell.

"The worst stampede I ever work with was 3000 steers from three to seven years old. The herd was ready to be driven to Amarillo for shipment to market. About mid-night something scared one or two of the animals and the fear spread to the whole herd like a flash of light and the whole herd raised and started at the same moment. This [bunch?] of steers were the worse bunch of scared animals I ever saw and what scared the animals was a mystery. After the animals started to run, trying to stop the herd, was useless. The old steers became furious and bowed their necks if a horse ran into their way. After two horses were gored and one rider stomped to death we gave [up all?] efforts to turn the herd and just let the animals run. This herd ended their run when it became tuckered out and scattered among other cattle.

"Johnson had contracted to deliver the 3000 steers, so the next day we had to cut out again.

"Stampedes were frequent at times and then for weeks at a time the critters would not stamp.

"Rustlers gave us trouble in streaks. For a spell we would have no trouble and then the gang would set in and keep us jumping. The greatest haul rustlers made on a 'W' ranch herd was 225 critters in one night.

"The rustlers came to the Pecos region from [?] co. 9 They rode up to two night riders about 3 A.M. and pretended they were lost. While a couple of the rustlers were in conversation with the waddies, suddenly several of the rustlers pounced on the night riders

Library of Congress

and bound them with rawhide ropes, and left them lying on the ground. The rustlers then cut out the critters and drove the animals off.

"When the boys failed to show up at chuck time that morning a party of waddies started to hunt for the waddies, and they were found late in the evening. It was too late then for trailing. The following morning the foreman and six waddies started out to follow the trail. The trail led to the east and ended in Menard co. Of course we didn't follow the tracks the entire distance, because we lost the tracks about 50 miles from our range. The number the rustlers had taken away was too many for them to keep under cover and we were able to follow the cattle from information. Folks, here and there, would tell us that a herd of about [?] critters with the 'W' brand was seen going east.

"When we arrived in [?] co, we [n tified?] Dick, who was then sheriff of the county. The sheriff joined us with a number of his deputies. The sheriff was quite certain who the rustlers were and the herd was located where his suspicion directed us.

"I shall leave the rustlers names unspoken, because some of them, and some of their relatives, are still living and I do not wish to cause embarrassment.

"When we located the herd we surrounded the camp and then the sheriff went to the camp and told the fellows they were 10 surrounded, so had better come with him without any fuss, which they did. They were tried, convicted and served a term in the State Penintentitary.

"Rustling is still one of the major problems of the ranchers. Today the auto-truck is the means used to rustle cattle. The number taken at one time is small. The number is not over a dozen at one haul.

"The cattlemens Association had made the handling [??] large numbers of rustled cattle impracticable, because the sale of rustled cattle must be confined to retail markets. Retail markets can't handle over one or two head of cattle at one time. The Association maintains

Library of Congress

inspectors at all wholesale cattle markets and the brands are carefully checked when the critters are placed on sale.

“The rustlers have adopted ingenious equipment for carrying on their trade.

“Since I was elected sheriff of [?] co, in 1914, I have had the chance to watch the progress rustlers have made in developing equipment they use. When the autotruck was first used by the rustlers, the boys would cut the fence and drive into the range. Three [or four?] men always worked together and they would pick a yearling up and lift it into the truck. The kind of cattle which are now on the range, and has been for some years past, are gentle, so it is easy for the rustlers to lay hands on the critters.

“Of course, when a rancher found a gap in his fence, that would put him on notice [about?] the rustling and a hunt would start. 11 “The next move of progress the autotruck rustlers made, was the adoption of an end-gate to the body of the truck which could be swung down over the fence. The end-gate was used as a chute up which the cattle were driven. The chute was a great improvement over lifting the critters into the truck, because the loading was easier and quicker did and left no [?] gap. However, the chute still required considerable pulling, shoving, grunting and cussing to get the critter up the chute. The animals don't like to travel up the strange way. Therefore, it was still work to lead a critter.

“Recently the truck rustler had improved on the chute equipment. A crane is now used in connection with a portable fence. The truck [?] up the fence and the portable fence set up inside. The critters are then driven into the inclosure formed by the portable fence. A harness affair is placed on the critters to which a crane cable is hooked. With those steps completed [?] that remains to be done is hoist the animal up and swing it into the truck.

“Of course, during my days on the range the hoss was the means with which cattle were rustled. There were hundreds of cattle rustled which the ranchers never learned about. Law and order was making its appearance when I went to work for the 'W' outfit.

Library of Congress

Therefore, the gun battle between rustlers and ranch outfits was coming to an end. The officers had things fairly well under control.

"The Pecos River outfits had [things?] in hand. All the 12 ranchers had riders riding the range and co-operated with each other in looking after the cattle the same as they did in the general roundup.

These were the 'W', '[?]', 'LFB', Turkey [?], 'JAL'. [?] and a few other small outfits ranging in the Pecos region and co-operated in the work. During the roundups, crews of all the outfits united under one superintendent. Now the fence riders co-operate in watching the range fence and the rustlers. In fact, during the past few years more men are on duty watching the rustlers than were used during my time.

"The range covered during the general roundups extended from [?], New Mex. to the Rio Grande border of Texas. Each roundup crew consisted of about 100 men with representatives from each outfit. Each crew worked a specified section under a range boss. The roundup lasted about three months and I shall estimate the number of cattle handled at 400. [?] C.

"After the [roundup?] work was finished, our work reverted to the regular duties and drives to market. Amarillo and Clarendon Texas, was the points we shipped from. The distance of the drive was approximately 600 miles and we allowed about 60 days to complete the drive.

"We never had any serious trouble on the drive. We had an occasional stampede, but were never bothered with Indian raids or other depredations. The days of the Indian troubles were past when I made the cattle drives.

"In the [?????] few bad men felt [over?] from the [?] 13 Jim Fraser, Burney [?] and Sam [?], were still in the Pecos region. They were tough as the word tough meant those days. That is they would not back away from a gun fight and could take care of themselves in

Library of Congress

one. Them men, and others, never thought of settling a fued in any other manner besides the gun. However, during the late 90's and thereafter shootings were not so grequent as during the prior times.

"I reckon [??] was the quickest on the draw and the most true shot in the section during my days in the Pecos section. He was a wizzard with the gun. To give you some idea of his [ability?], I shall sort of describe the man and tell about one of his shooting affairs. He was six foot tall and rawboned. A man that was cool as a cucumber at all times and one may as/ well tryed to excite a hippopotamus as to flustrate [?] [?].

"There was a fued existing between [?] and two other men. Bill Ahart and John Lawson were their names. The two men went gunning for [?] and declared they would shoot him where and when found. In Pecos was bar called 'Number Seven' and [?] was at the bar the time of the event I am relating. His adversaries learned where he was and went in to kill him.

"When the two men entered the bar, one of them said, 'Riggs you'er through', and each man [?] swing their guns while the words were being spoken, but they did [?] succeed in making one shot. Before either men could shoot, Riggs had drew his gun and shot each of them. 14 ""I speak of them men as being tough, but they were tough in a different sense than the so called tough [men?] of today. Outside of a very few, such as Billy the Kid, the tough men did not kill for money or shoot their adversary in the back, neither did they sneak up and cover their opponent without giving him an even chance. They calculated that if you [were?] not willing to match shooting ability with them [?] you had no business taking part in a difference with them. However, they would not intentionly take undue [advantage?] of anyone. Them men lived a rough and heart life and were rough and ready in their ways.

"I shall relate the nature of a contest held, as told to me. Now, I do not vouch for the facts of this story, but it was told by a responsible Fort Worth, business man following a

Library of Congress

business call in Pecos city during the early days. He was asked how he found conditions in Pecos and told the following:

"I arrived in Pecos late the day of July 3, and engaged [a room?] at the hotel. I requested the clerk to not disturb me in the morning until the last call for breakfast. He said, 'Well, stranger, we'r celebrating here tommorow and the first doings starts at 6 A.M., so I can't say as you won't be disturbed!'

"Long before 6 A.M. the noise was so great I was unable to sleep. I dressed and went out to watch the entertainment. At 6 A.M. four mounted cowboys were lined up and with the sound of a pistol shot they dashed off.

"About the time the cowboys left the hotel proprietor announced breakfast. I, with others, went into eat [?] [?] hear the people arguing the merits of their [?] [?] 15 favorites and betting money on them.

"Shortly after I had [finsihed?] my eating, one of the contestants returned and the others followed with their appearance shortly. Each of the men had a wildcat and a rattlesnake. None of the snakes were less than five feet long.

"There was a tub of gyp water setting in the square and each man rode up to the tub and dismounted. They immediately [?] to whip their wildcats with the snakes and continued to whip the animals until the cats took a drink of the gyp water. Of course, the man who first made his cat drink was declared the winner.

"I learned that this contest was just a warming up exercise and that the real contests are to follow. I feared that things may become a little rough, so hired a livery rig to drive me east.

Library of Congress

“Now, this Fort Worth citizen may have exaggerated a trifle or he may have [?] a supply of Fort Worth liquor with him and had over indulged. But, the waddies enjoyed rough play. I shall relate some playing incidents which I can vouch for, because I was present.

“Occasionally [??] would visit the section with the object of investing money in land [?] cattle and sometimes both. The range looked so much the same in all places that a tenderfoot would easily become lost. When a tenderfoot desired to look over the land, one [?] two waddies would accompany him to assure his safe return.

“On one occasion an easterner started out with two of the ranch waddies and when at a short distance from the camp, the rawhides became engaged in a heated argument. There was one 16 waddy on either side of the tenderfoot and at the high point of the argument each waddy began to shoot at the other. The tenderfoot spurred his mount to get away, but the waddies spurred their mounts and kept the fellow between them, until they had emptied their six-guns.

“When the waddies rained their mounts [??], the fellow returned to camp at top speed. That tenderfoot was shaking as an aspen leaf in a heavy gale when he dismounted and he had changed his mind about looking the territory over. Of course, the waddies had fiented the quarrel and had shot blank cartridges.

“Fienting a quarrel and shooting blank cartridges with a greener between two [?] was a favorite trick with the waddies on the '[N?]' outfit.

“When I quit the range in 1914 I was still employed on the '[N?]' ranch, which was 19 years after I started to work for the outfit. During those years I held every position, even to being a cowpoke, except that [??] and belly-cheater. I was wagon boss at the time I terminated my range career.

“Cowpoke is a term applied to a man that travels with a train load of cattle. Sometimes they are spoken of as bull-nurses. The cowpoke's job is to keep watch over the car [?] of

Library of Congress

cattle and poke the animals up if one got down. The animals are loaded so compact that if one got down it can't get up without assistance, unless room is made for it, because of the crowding from the other animals. When shipping cattle the animals must be loaded compact, otherwise the critters would be knocked down from the jerking of the train..

"I made many trips as a cowpoke to Kansas City, but the only 17 part of the trips I enjoyed was the few days time we could spend at Kansas City, after the critters were delivered. Poking critters is a hard and dirty job. It is necessary to keep a close watch, because of an animal goes down it will be shortly stomped to death.

"At the time I quit the 'W' ranch [?] and Everman were the owners of the ranch. The Johnson Brothers had sold out to themnew owners in 1910.

"After I quit the range I was elected sheriff of [?] co. and have had the office continually since, with the exception of [?] months. I was elected first in 1914 and resigned in after serving six months in 1926. I was a candidate the following election and was again elected.

"I [?] have watched the Pecos range section of Texas as it transformed from a country with cattle, numbering hundreds of thousands, roaming over the land to a busy oil producing center. Now one can travel a distance of [?] miles and never be out of the sight of derricks. However, the cattle are not all gone. There are many herds still roaming the range, but its all fenced. Therefore we have a mixture of people, cowhands, [?], men, oil magnets and oil field workers mingle in their daily activities.